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FM AMCONSUL LAHORE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4085  
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4799  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0822  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0443  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2097  
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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 5237

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: NAWAZ SHARIF ACQUITTED IN HELICOPTER CASE

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: A two-member Rawalpindi branch of the Lahore High Court (LHC) acquitted Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif of the alleged illegal purchase of a helicopter on June 26. The original sentence was handed down in 2000, immediately before Sharif was sent into exile. Sharif filed the appeal earlier this year, after the reinstatement of the Chief Justice. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The LHC declared the sentence null and void based on lack of evidence, gross irregularities in the court proceedings and, "glaring lapses on the part of the prosecution," according to press. In July of 2000, the National Accountability Board (NAB) court convicted Sharif for failure to disclose income and pay taxes on the purchase of helicopter. The NAB court handed Sharif a 14-year prison sentence, a Rs 50 million fine and, he was disqualified from contesting elections for 21 years. Shortly after the verdict, Sharif was exiled to Saudi Arabia and did not file an appeal until April of 2009.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In his arguments, Sharif's lawyer and former Attorney General of Punjab Khawaja Harris told the court that Sharif did not purchase the Russian-made MI-8 helicopter, but rented the helicopter for use during his election campaign in 1993. PML-N, he argued before the court, covered the cost of the helicopter, not Sharif. In his arguments, Harris said Sheikh Abdul Rehman Al-Sani of Qatar owned the helicopter and was not summoned to appear before the NAB court during the initial proceedings. According to press, Harris stated there was insufficient evidence to prove Sharif had purchased the helicopter. As Sharif was forced into exile a few days after the verdict, Harris said, the court did not provide adequate time for an appeal.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The prosecution argued Sharif willingly delayed filing the petition for political gains, arguing he should have filed the appeal immediately upon return from exile in 2007. Special Public Prosecutor from the NAB Abdul Basir Qureshi disputed Sharif's argument that he did not trust the courts, noting that Sharif had filed an appeal to return from exile and could have done the same in this case. In response, Sharif's counsel told the court that his client took oath from his party workers to strive for independence of the judiciary, so he could not file an appeal before the court even after he returned to the country.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Comment: The NAB can file an appeal to the Supreme Court, but there have not been any reports that an appeal will be filed. Post will continue to watch the case and report any further developments. End Comment.

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